



PGA News

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WOUNDED WARRIORS FIND A NEW CHAPTER IN LIFE THROUGH LAUNCH OF PGA/DISABLED SPORTS USA MILITARY GOLF PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, D.C. – For 91 years, The PGA of America has made it a mission to promote the game of golf and elevate the role of the professional. On Thursday afternoon, and just 20 minutes from the steps of the U.S. Capitol, the Association took a new step forward to enrich the lives of the nation's Wounded Warriors.

The PGA of America/Disabled Sports USA Military Golf Program laid the foundation for what officials believe is a new chapter in connecting golf with those who have served this country and paid a major sacrifice. As part of the Association's initiative, it has joined the *America Supports You* team, a Department of Defense program that highlights and recognizes citizens' support for members of the U.S. Armed Services and their families.

"This is a moment where we can pause and see how Americans come together to recognize those of us who serve," said Rear Admiral Frank Thorp IV, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense during a news conference at the Army Navy Country Club. "The PGA of America does so many other things in golf, but today they are here recognizing the members of the Armed Services.

"These are not just words, but tangible efforts. It makes us proud you are willing to take that commitment. We are so appreciative of what you are doing. It is truly eye-watering."

The program is a nationwide initiative that partners with Disabled Sports USA, which offers rehabilitation programs in 19 sports; the Wounded Warrior Disabled Sports Project, which provides sports programs for severely wounded service members from the Iraq and Afghanistan conflict and the Global War on Terrorism.

"Today we gather as a team, and what we are doing with this program goes beyond golf," said PGA of America President Brian Whitcomb. "This is about giving back, helping enrich the lives of others who have served this country so well. The PGA of America is extremely proud to partner with Disabled Sports USA, the Wounded Warriors and joining the *America Supports You* team.

"We team together to help these brave men and women. And, I can't imagine the teamwork of what goes on among the members of the Armed Services who are involved in conflict. We are honored to be with you."

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Joining in the announcement were Disabled Sports USA Executive Director Kirk Bauer, a disabled Vietnam War veteran; PGA/LPGA Professional Judy Alvarez of Palm City, Fla., the program's national trainer; and PGA Professional Jim Estes of Olney, Md., the PGA director of instruction at Olney Golf Park.

"Our work is about changing lives," said Bauer, who lost the lower part of his right leg in a grenade accident 39 years ago in Vietnam. "Thirty-nine years ago, I went through this. The Wounded Warriors of then and today need something to hold on to. Golf is one of those tools. You can only be excited for how quickly PGA Professionals such as those represented here today can make it happen for these brave men and women."

"The shorter benefit is enjoyment, but golf gives them a sport for the rest of their lives. I can't tell you how grateful we are to have The PGA of America as a partner. We can take the game to a newer level. And, we can help so many families as they go through the healing process and therapy with their loved ones."

Of those Wounded Warriors, four were guests at the new conference. Three veterans had suffered the loss of limbs in Iraq – Army Staff Sgt. Joe Bowser of Washington, D.C.; Army Sgt. (Ret.) Orlando Gill, of Suitland, Md., Army Sgt. Sean Lewis of Dale City, Va., and Army Sgt. First Class David Cook of Havre de Grace, Md., who two months ago lost his right leg below the knee in a training accident in the Republic of Georgia.

"Golf is a sport that you can play with your family all your life," said 23-year-old Army Sgt. Sean Lewis of Dale City, Va., who lost his right leg above the knee in a mortar attack in January 2004 in Iraq. "This program is huge. It's a great part of rehab as it gets you out of the hospital and kind of restarts your life all over again.

"I first tried to hit a golf ball in October 2004, and it wasn't pretty. I was wearing a prosthetic, but I couldn't hit the ball at all. Now, I'm tossing the prosthetic aside and things are much better for me. Golf can help all veterans mentally and physically. My leg is a lot stronger, and my torso, for having played golf. Mentally, if you can get out on the course, then everything leaves your mind except that you are only thinking about playing golf."

Cook, the father of three, said that he is a few weeks away from receiving a prosthetic leg. Once affixed, he plans to renew his golf routine that allowed him to have a 10 handicap prior to his accident.

"I want to go out and help recruit more veterans for this program," said Cook. "After all what you (The PGA of America) are doing for us, I feel that I owe it. Golf is great, because when you get on a course you can forget about everything else."

Alvarez, who became a PGA Professional in 1993, began teaching the disabled at Southwinds Golf Course in Boca Raton, Fla. She has taken the lead in the program by training PGA Professionals as well as members of the Armed Services. Alvarez has traveled to the facilities hosting this program for the nation's three primary military hospitals – Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.; Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas; and Naval Medical Center San Diego in San Diego, Calif.

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“When I first began teaching those with disabilities,” said Alvarez. “I soon realized that they were teaching me. They shared what they could do and it helped me become a better teacher. We should not look at what their disabilities are, but what abilities they do have. The game of golf can help so many physically, emotionally and mentally.”

Alvarez told a story about how she encountered a Wounded Warrior in San Diego who wore a helmet as a preparation for cranial surgery, had lost both his legs, one of his ring fingers and was destined to lose another finger soon after her visit due to his injuries.

“He was really apprehensive to be outside, with people watching him hit a golf ball,” said Alvarez. “But, we got him positioned in a single-rider golf cart, and after about 20 minutes he was hitting the ball into the air. He looked up, reared back his shoulders, extended his chest and had a glimmer of a smile. That is something I will never forget.”

The Middle Atlantic PGA Section was represented by seven PGA Professionals, including Estes, who has given all Wounded Warriors free admission to Olney Golf Park.

“I was touched by the ability and the courage of a guy to take on the sport with one leg,” said Estes, who has coached Lewis in becoming a golf-lover, who spends 60 hours a week playing the game. “When you are an able-bodied person and you come across the situation where you don’t hit the ball well, you have the tendency to give up. These guys don’t have that word in their vocabulary. They have conviction, perseverance, fortitude, and courage, whatever you want to call it. Sean wasn’t willing to say ‘no.’ He started off just awful, but he decided that he was taking 40 hours of his time and use golf as therapy. His emotions didn’t rise and fall as failure, because there was no failure in his mind.”

The PGA of America/Disabled Sports USA Military Golf Program utilizes PGA Professionals to guide disabled veterans through a curriculum that features golf’s basic skills; the basic Rules of Golf; employ teaching techniques that would utilize adaptive equipment where necessary; demonstrate how golf may be used as part of rehabilitation and teach safety concerns in swinging a golf club and the importance of stretching.

“We have a great start today, but this is just the beginning,” said Whitcomb. “We want to expand to all facilities, to help all our member professionals become as excited about the individuals they meet just as we have today with these proud and brave Americans.”

For more information on The PGA of America/Disabled Sports USA Military Golf Program, please visit www.pgafoundation.org. To find a PGA Professional who teaches those with disabilities, please visit www.PlayGolfAmerica.com.

The PGA of America is the world's largest working sports organization comprised of 28,000 men and women golf Professionals who are the recognized experts in growing, teaching and managing the game of golf while serving millions of people throughout its 41 PGA Sections nationwide. Since its founding in 1916, The PGA of America has enhanced its leadership position in a \$62 billion-a-year industry by growing the game of golf through its premier spectator events, world-class education and training programs, significant philanthropic outreach initiatives, and award-winning golf promotions. Today's PGA Professional is the public's link to the game, serving an essential role in the operation of golf facilities throughout the country.